KEEPING AMERICA STRONG

U.S. Mayors 04 Metro Agenda for America's Future

THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

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Presidential elections are the single greatest opportunity for America to direct its future.

We entrust to presidential leadership the health of our democracy and the long-term growth of our economy — both critical to the advancement of freedom and opportunity everywhere in the world.

This means "Keeping America Strong."

America's metro areas, its cities and suburbs, are the engines of our nation's great economy. In the last ten years, U.S. metros have generated 87% of our economic growth, over $3.8 trillion. Our cities generate over 85% of the nation's economic output, labor income and jobs. In the global marketplace, U.S. metros represent 48 of the world's largest 100 economies.

Keeping America Strong therefore means keeping America's metro economies strong. Doing so affects every American family's prospects for success, helps to ensure individual opportunity, and enables America to be a world leader.

The sustainable growth of our metro economies is dependent on a President who will work closely with mayors to develop the most innovative, and creative policies for the country. America's strength has always been locally driven, in its communities. We do not need a federal government that delivers unfunded mandates. Instead we need true partnership and real results for the American people.

The mayors of America and others who have joined us invite the American public to consider the following agenda as we select our next president. We hope voters will ask tough questions about the future of our country.

And, of course, we encourage every American to vote.

Homeland Security: Keeping America Safe

Our future requires a strong, comprehensive homeland security system to protect every American community from terrorism. To achieve this, a new more productive partnership must be formed between cities and the Federal government.

The cornerstone of this new partnership must be trust and teamwork. Cities continue to work hard for safety, but must deal with state bureaucracies slow to distribute funds where they are needed most. To cut through needless bureaucratic delay, homeland security funds should go directly to cities based on their threat vulnerability assessments.

A new focus on terrorism prevention at home is required that effectively uses the 600,000 police officers already protecting our communities. A whole new communication and coordination system is required to link federal officials with local officials to protect American citizens.

While progress has been made, we must set up a mechanism for tough evaluation of how well we are doing. A new permanent, independent commission, not subject to political influence, should be established to continuously judge our overall system of terrorism prevention and preparedness. We must be honest with ourselves as to how well federal, state and local governments are doing in building a truly effective homeland security system. The American people deserve this level of honesty and objectivity.

To keep Americans safe, the federal government must renew its commitment to fight both terrorism *and* traditional crime. The average American is still more likely to be a victim of crime than of terrorism. We must put more officers on the street, support the local law enforcement block grant, completely reform the juvenile justice system, provide drug treatment to every American who needs it, prevent gun and gang violence, and address the more than 600,000 ex-convicts re-entering society each year, many of whom will eventually return to prison.

As a nation, economic growth depends on safety both from terrorism and crime.

Smart Investment: New Infrastructure for a New Economy

Our metro economies need modern infrastructure to secure the nation's future economic growth, yet the American Society of Civil Engineers gives the vast majority of U.S. infrastructure a failing grade (D or F).

America needs a 21st Century transportation system built with ultra-modern high speed rail, bus, transit and new technology in mind. By investing our dollars wisely, we can link our major metro areas, cut the time people spend stuck in traffic jams away from their families, create jobs, and make our new economy (based on the rapid movement of goods and services) function more productively.

Developing a new, modern infrastructure investment plan, creatively using pension funds, insurance guarantees, infrastructure bonds, and creative public/private partnerships to help finance major projects will bring more economic growth to the nation by keeping our metro economies strong.

America also needs a new, innovative energy plan that finally frees us and our allies from dependence on oil, undercutting the financing of terrorists, securing our economic future and saving the world environment simultaneously. We have the technology. We need the national leadership to lead us the rest of the way there.

Jobs for our Future: Keeping America at Work in a Global Economy

The federal government must be responsive to the new realities that our workers face.

Over the last three years, the nation has lost 2.4 million jobs. Manufacturing jobs have been particularly hard hit and many of them will not return in the post-recession years. Additionally, new jobs will have a salary 18% smaller than those that were lost.

For the first time, professional white collar jobs are also feeling the pressure of global competition. Your X-ray, your company's legal staff, its design and engineering services, and even accounting department are no longer safe.

The nation's metro economies must grow good jobs faster than they lose them. Today, most new jobs are created by small businesses. Therefore, America needs new targeted incentives to help small businesses innovate, create real jobs, and train workers in our metro economies. The next President also needs to ensure corporate integrity to restore public confidence in our private and financial institutions.

To help the next generation compete for jobs globally, we need presidential leadership to fulfill our moral responsibility to dramatically improve public schools. While we may have passed a bill called "*No Child Left Behind*," it has not been fully funded, nor will it get us to where we need to be. We need smaller, more innovative public high schools; we need fully funded Head Start; and we need the federal government to keep its commitment to fund 100% of special education costs, freeing up more local resources to improve our public schools.

Tax Incentives to Foster Public/Private Partnerships

Keeping Metro economies growing also depends on the creation of innovative public/private partnerships to invest wisely in infrastructure and sustainable development projects.

Targeted tax incentives — to attract private investments in the nation's 600,000 brownfields, to help build low- and moderate-income single and multifamily housing, and to foster private investment in modern infrastructure development including transportation and water systems — will leverage even more business development and job creation in our metro economies.

These creative partnerships can be the hallmark of bringing private sector ingenuity to rebuild many of our communities that need investment and jobs.

Caring for the Health of People: At Home and Abroad

America's medical research is the best in the world. Yet disparity of health care among our citizens is dramatic and access to quality health care remains out of reach for many.

Every child in America should be guaranteed health insurance coverage, and every parent should be responsible for obtaining health insurance for their children. For unemployed or low-wage parents, the government should provide affordable insurance options and financial help in securing insurance through refundable tax credits, the CHIP program, or other means.

In addition, every American family, individual, or small business owner should be guaranteed access to affordable health care coverage by having coverage similar to that enjoyed by our representatives in Congress

To spend the taxpayer's dollars wisely, Federal, state and local governments should be given the authority to negotiate affordable cheaper drug prices from the pharmaceutical industry.

With world travel and commerce, citizens of all nations are vulnerable to the spread of global disease. It is the moral obligation of the United States to participate in or develop a global system of distributing drugs cost-effectively that can save millions of lives and preserve the social fabric of thousands of communities.

This is especially true of the HIV/AIDS pandemic sweeping the world. Future generations and historians will judge us, in part, by how we respond to such devastating diseases as the world's leading developer of life-saving drugs.

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